

Quarterly Performance Review of the Arizona Education Learning and Accountability System: AELAS

Submitted to the Arizona Department of Education by
WestEd and CELT

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OVERVIEW

This report documents a quarterly performance review of the Arizona Education Learning and Accountability System (AELAS) by an independent evaluator as required by *Arizona Revised Statutes* (A.R.S) 15-249 that was conducted September 30 – October 2, 2015. WestEd (the prime contractor) and CELT (the subcontractor) were hired by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to serve as that independent evaluator. This quarterly monitoring report is a follow-up to the initial performance review conducted in 2013, with a report submitted on September 9, 2013. This report follows all previous quarterly monitoring reports, updating commendations and recommendations. However, this report also reports on progress targeted in the Special Review of the AzEDS Implementation Options report delivered to ADE on May 14, 2015.

ADE decided to implement a “dual system” methodology for district data submissions to address implementation delays in the receipt of district data through AzEDS. The critical AELAS milestone of July 1, 2015 for the changes in how districts submit information to the ADE was not going to be met due to the fact that vendor certifications for Ed-Fi were lagging and because the business rules for SAIS had not been all re-codified. The dual system option for district data submission was assessed by the West Ed/CELT team during a site visit on May 6, 2015. The progress on the dual system option was reviewed during the September/October visit. The ADE team appears to be closing in on having this option functional, however the dates for the deliverables have slipped. Final user acceptance testing on the new ACE routines will not finish until November. This may slip further into 2016. This is due to the vagaries in the business rules and specifications and the potential for changes as the UAT uncovers additional data/rules issues. The June report on this dual approach indicated that the project deliverable dates would be difficult to meet due to IT resource constraints and the limited availability of the finance team to develop and finalize the SAIS/AzEDS business rules. These issues still remain. Schedule delays aside, the ADE appears to be close to proving the viability of the AzEDS data collection approach.

Beyond the dual option approach, the September/October review was reduced in scope to address only those projects currently funded for AELAS. These included: PSO (including production services), School Finance (SAIS), AzEDS and Opt-in SSIS.

COMMENDATIONS

Commendations pertain to activities that ADE is doing especially well and are highlighted as examples of superlative performance. The WestEd/CELT team has noted the following commendations from observations during the September-October 2015 site visit:

1. Data governance continues to move forward with the establishment of the data governance committee.
2. The ADE has made significant progress on the dual option approach despite resource constraints and limited access to the business owners for rules and requirements definitions.

- The ADE continues to engage the business partners through the Education Transformation group. This enables the business partners and IT to address current and emerging needs through collaborative decision making.

FINDINGS BY RECOMMENDATIONS

The 10 initial recommendations served as the baseline from which the WestEd/CELT team working during the site visit. An additional recommendation was added at a later date. Below is a synthesis of the team’s findings as they pertain to each recommendation. We add one to highlight its importance for the sustainability of AELAS.

The ADE should reach out to prominent business and community leaders for assistance in developing and implementing a sustainability plan. This plan might include the current equivalent of the Arizona Ready Education Council who participated in the WestEd/CELT initial interview process.

1. Stay the course as envisioned in the AELAS business case.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
The AELAS funding for 2015-16 has been reduced to include only 4 major efforts: PSO (including production services), School Finance (SAIS), AzEDS and Opt-in SSIS. This is a scaled-back scope from the original business case.	.
<p>The dual system approach is close to being complete, with the most difficult components either completed or nearing completion. The API data submission process has been turned on for 34 districts and seems to be functioning as designed. UAT for the ACE component will not complete until November, with the risk of further delay as the UAT uncovers additional processing requirements not previously identified by the business owners.</p> <p>Additionally, some district business managers are just now becoming fully aware of the potential for impact to their ADM and</p>	<p>ADE must continue to press the finance area to give priority to the replacement for SAIS. The recently established DAWG group – a process to bring together the stakeholders for rapid decision making - has helped to move the dual-option along. This is a key governance process that should be continued.</p> <p>The ADE has broadcast the potential for ADM and funding changes for many months now, most recently through the October AASBO</p>

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
<p>financials. As the AzEDS reports are turned on upon completion of the dual option approach, the ADM counts from the new rules have the potential to create considerable consternation.</p> <p>Having a good communication plan and materials to communicate to stakeholders would improve their understanding of the dual systems and the differences.</p>	<p>webinar. These opportunities for constant communication should continue.</p> <p>Create communications materials and FAQ’s to help to educate and inform how the dual system process works and what the comparison between the two systems is actually telling the districts when there are differences.</p> <p>Continue to strive toward communication that is simplistic to the education audiences and stakeholders to maximize their understanding of the process, and thereby increase buy-in.</p>
<p>The 915 process (prior year budget changes) approach has not been flushed out yet. Key questions remain, such as how to do rollover and how to handle security to allow district to submit changes. Time still remains before this becomes a critical issue next year but it does need to be addressed.</p>	<p>The responsibility and accountability for this process needs to be placed with the finance team. This includes pursuing re-engineering efforts to streamline the process and responsibility for communicating the new process.</p>
<p>SSIS Opt-In Project:</p> <p>The SSIS conversions slowed in the last months due to high volumes of support requests. The June report indicated that “The district support team is working to ensure they have the people and processes to support districts with AELAS (particularly SSIS)”. However, help desk and 2nd tier support for the SSIS, while planned for the rollout, proved inadequate to meet the support demand. The decision was reached to slow the next wave of deployment to allow the support processes to</p>	<p>Continue the efforts to re-engineer the help desk processes and bring in a help desk expert to identify best practices.</p> <p>The Appendix outlines specific metrics, strategies, and goals that will enable the monitoring and ultimately the improvement of help desk performance.</p>

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
<p>be improved. This will affect the revenue projections for the SSIS opt-in project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The support processes for ADE do not appear to be mature to the point that the proper data is captured, analyzed, and acted upon in a timely cycle of continuous improvement to identify and address root causes for high call volumes. ADE has begun a process improvement effort to address the help desk issues. • Some of the help-desk calls go on for over an hour, even up to three or four hours. This is an indication that the help desk is actually performing the role of training for district staff that lack the skills required to run the SSIS for the district. 	<p>Identify district staff (of the 3 allowed designees per district for calling in SSIS problems) that need additional training – whether from being new to the role or who need remedial training. Require that they attend training and receive certification before allowing them to continue in the SSIS support role.</p> <p>Begin to design metrics to examine the topics of help desk calls to better identify areas where more attention needs to be given for extra technical assistance. The metrics are an essential way of identifying and capturing problematic processes and issues.</p>

2. **Utilize business architecture concepts, aligning department strategic plans to and across program area plans and associated execution activities and methodologies.**

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>

3. ADE directly address the budgetary issues that pertain to AELAS, SAIS, and the SLDS that include detailed work plans, deliverables, and timelines.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
Funding to adequately sustain the components of AELAS beyond this fiscal year seems to be in question among the legislature. Failure to adequately fund the AELAS components will result in another round of insufficiently supported systems (as with SAIS) and low customer (school district) satisfaction with ADE services.	Convene a working committee of local business CIOs and CEOs to review the support budget for AELAS and recommend to the legislature an adequate funding amount for ongoing AELAS support.
Funding for further development of AELAS is limited in the 2015-16 budget. This seriously diminishes the potential return on the investments made in AELAS. The work so far has laid an excellent foundation upon which to construct additional functions and services that could benefit the districts and schools.	Leading states and school districts across the nation are pursuing such 21 st Century initiatives as blended learning, personalized learning and digital learning. AELAS can be a foundation for similar visions for Arizona. Leverage the AELAS components to further such a strategic vision for education in Arizona.
Project plans and associated timelines do not adequately capture impacts of non-IT resource constraints and implementation activities necessary for system adoption. Furthermore, accountability for meeting deliverable dates does not appear to be evenly shared between IT and the business units. This seems to be systemic trend, which has resulted in a series of missed milestone dates.	Modify the ADE project management discipline to include the non-technology tasks required to deploy information systems. Hold all parties accountable for their milestone dates.

4. Improve and continue to develop a communication plan to diverse stakeholders.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
Managing the questions and concerns that will potentially result from the new AzEDS	Move the point for addressing these questions away from IT. Establish a communications

<p>business rules on ADM and funding will be very important when the dual option approach goes into production in the 4th quarter of this year.</p>	<p>team made up of ADE leadership, finance experts and communications specialists to address the questions from the district. Establish a protocol for addressing question and concerns.</p>
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5. Creation of a data governance process.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
<p>Data governance continues to make progress and gain adoption.</p> <p>The data governance process is assisted by the collaborative work of the Education Transformation group.</p> <p>More input is coming from the business owners in terms of data and metric needs.</p>	<p>Continue to support the progress being made.</p>
<p>The tools for identifying duplicate students have improved the states’ ability to flag these situations. However there is not a clear process for cleaning up duplicates. This responsibility moves to the LEA to fix the duplicates at the source (the SIS). This new capability to flag and remove duplicate students may affect the ADM, although there is uncertainty as to what degree.</p>	<p>Engage the data governance process to begin to resolve this data quality issue.</p>

6. Reduce the redundancy among data collections.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
<p>The data governance process has implemented the processes required to properly review new data collection requests. They are working on</p>	<p>None</p>

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
an annual calendar that defines the timeframes for identifying and communicating new data collections.	

7. Creation of a non-profit organizing structure.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
<p>There is renewed interest in this recommendation at ADE and among the legislature, especially as funding for AELAS support and further development is in question.</p> <p>There is interest from the legislature about the creation of a non-profit organizing structure.</p>	<p>Explore the options for a non-profit services organization that focuses on supporting and further developing the AELAS components to address the local district and school needs. Focus the mission of the organization on being self-sufficient in supporting the AELAS systems for districts while at the same time lowering district costs for such systems and services.</p> <p>Brief interested senators, as per their requests.</p> <p>Seek support from prominent state business partners. The ADE should reach out to prominent business and community leaders for assistance in developing and implementing a sustainability plan. This plan might include the current equivalent of the Arizona Ready Education Council who participated in the WestEd/CELT initial interview process.</p>

8. Improvement of human capacity around the use of data (e.g., data literacy).

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
Although this topic falls outside the current scope of monitoring, ADE is making progress in this area. ADE has developed a rubric of data literacy skills and is working with schools of education to integrate data literacy the preparation of teachers and administrators.	Continue the effort to build data literacy within ADE, the LEAs, and teacher preparation programs.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
There are efforts within ADE to improve the capacity of program staff to understand simple statistics and measurement topics to help them understand data better. Podcasts have been developed.	

9. Attend closely to the needs of the most rural districts.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
No new findings or recommendations in this area.	

10. Development of a comprehensive long-term plan and continued outreach to stakeholders in the form of periodic needs analyses as a process by which to monitor changing needs of the stakeholder groups.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
The sustainability of AELAS during the continued development and implementation, and then beyond to maintenance of the technology, the data, and use over time is essential to the success of the project.	Convene a high-level group of knowledgeable stakeholders, led by prominent business people and stakeholders to advise ADE in developing and implementing a sustainability plan. This group could be led by someone like Craig Barrett and call upon a powerful group the current equivalent of the Arizona Ready Education Council, that provided initial input and support.

11. Engage program areas and policymakers in supporting the work of AELAS.

<u><i>Finding</i></u>	<u><i>Recommendations</i></u>
The associate superintendents are now engaged in working with IT to ensure that the technologies meet their needs and incorporate appropriate data.	

<i>Finding</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
The work of the Education Transformation group facilitates this work.	

CHALLENGES

- The most pressing challenges for the ADE from our visit appear to be:
1. Getting enough time from the program areas for AzEDS and the SAIS replacement for:
 - a. Development of the business rules;
 - b. Testing of the new AzEDS and SAIS data flows and results;
 - c. Development of good communications and FAQs; and
 - d. Establishing and executing a district response plan for customer queries and concerns when the dual district data submission systems are implemented
 2. The sustainability and continuity of commitment to the AELAS work across all levels of government in Arizona.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

AELAS forms a good foundation for Arizona to begin the journey into the world of data-informed instruction and ultimately digital learning. However, without a clear vision for such a direction and funding to build upon this foundation, the momentum gained by the AELAS effort stands to be lost. Arizona has climbed into the top tier of education departments with regard to data collection and potential for data informed instruction supported by state systems. This progress will be quickly lost without proper vision, and support. We strongly urge ADE to work with external advisors to develop and implement a sustainability plan.

APPENDIX: HELP DESK MEASURES AND STRATEGIES

This appendix contains specific strategies and recommendations to monitor and improve help desk performance. It includes metrics and target goals.

Help Desk Measures and Accompanying Strategies

1. First-call (tier 1) resolution rate. Target: 70% overall

Also break this measure into first-call rate by help-desk person (and tier-2 and tier-3 person) and type of call. Note: this measure and those that follow requires that robust data is captured for all calls, such as who made the call, what type of problem, date and time of the call, who responded to the call (and who provided tier 2 or 3 resolution if needed), duration of the call, time to resolve the problem (especially if it goes to tier 2 or 3), customer satisfaction with the result and call wait time for the customer.

Strategies to meet 70%

- Analyze types of calls that go to tier 2. Rank order by frequency of occurrence. Determine which of the highly occurring calls can be addressed with additional training for the help desk.
- If the first-call resolution rate is high (or bolstered by) such easy-to-address call types such as password reset, then address the root cause (e.g., put in decent self serve password reset) and re-evaluate.
- Anticipate new types of calls – use the configuration/change management process to forewarn of potential help desk calls from application or system changes. Where possible, train the help desk on new releases of software and anticipated problem areas for customers.

2. Customer Satisfaction. Target: 95% customer satisfaction

Provide an option for each ticket to be closed with a customer satisfaction survey. Break this measure into customer satisfaction by help-desk person, type of call, and tier level (if resolved at tier 2 or 3).

Strategies to meet 95%

- Share customer satisfaction rating with help-desk staff and tier 2 and 3 providers each month.
- Recognize and reward highest achieving staff each month.
- Monitor for consistently low rates for individuals and types of calls.
- Coach the staff as needed if call satisfaction is consistently low.
- Provide customer service training to all help desk staff and tier 1 and 2 service providers.

3. The percent of customer calls answered by the help desk within an agreed time threshold. Target: 99% answered by the help desk within one minute.

Strategies to meet the target:

- Trend and report call volume data over time to determine periods of high call volume, such as return from holidays, report card time, state reporting windows and following new software releases. Have additional help desk staff on call for such anticipated high-volume periods.
 - Track the help desk staff utilization by person. Balance the call types and volumes to ensure a proper mix of help desk skills to match call volumes.
4. The average time to resolve calls that move to tier 2 and 3. Target: 95% within 2 days

Also break this measure into tier 2 and 3 support person and type of call (e.g., application name and problem type)

Strategies to meet 95% within 2 days:

- Monitor the data for tier 2 and 3 problem tickets at each staff meeting. Discuss trends where call types are averaging greater than 2 days. Discuss remediation for these call types.
 - Share average call closure data with each tier 2 and 3 support person. Set targets and discuss remediation strategies for long closure times.
5. The number of calls that last more than 15 minutes. Target: 0%

Track this by help desk person, caller, and type of problem. Collect statistics on the frequency of long calls by type of problem in particular. Examine the relationship between length of call and type of problem, noting average and modal time by problem type.

Strategies to eliminate long help desk calls:

- Trend the data to determine who these calls are from and determine if these are really supplemental training for users that need additional training. Require training for these callers before they are approved to be the district point of contact.
- Establish a policy that calls that approach 15 minutes are to be moved to tier 2.

Other strategies:

- Meet with the help desk team regularly and review performance and metrics. Use team discussion and ideas to identify and initiate efforts to eliminate the source of calls.
- Encourage help desk staff to go into every call with a positive, friendly attitude toward the caller and seek to understand the details of their issue/request, asking the right questions and actively listening.
- Empower the team to make front-line decisions and coordinate best practice processes. Conduct weekly, if not daily team de-briefings on the types of calls, trends, ideas for reducing call volumes and improving customer satisfaction. Proactively seek out trends, related issues and reoccurring issues and learn from the resulting data.
- Capture the ticket information on ***all*** calls. Require that ***all*** support requests go through the help desk.

- Implement a digital customer assistant to handle the low impact, repetitive calls with self-service.

